Do time and chance determine our fate?

Jan Beute
https://vlichthus.nl

Introduction

Do time and chance determine our lives, or else is everything arranged beforehand? Are we ourselves responsible, or has someone else taken that responsibility away from us? There are various opinions on these questions.

Countless pagan philosophies and Eastern teachings take as their starting point that there is no such thing as chance. The I Ching, a classical text from ancient China, is based on the proposition that everything is predetermined. The background of this philosophy is the balancing of opposites and the acceptance of the inevitable. Every person forms part of the great cosmic whole, in which each has his place. Man need not worry about what that place is, for it has been fixed in advance. The logical consequence is that after this life a person returns and begins another life.

A variant of the above philosophy is fatalism. Fatalism is the teaching that assumes man has no influence whatever on his fate. Every action and every deed in a person's life has already been determined by fate and is therefore fixed beforehand. Man's life course is foreknown and laid down. Everything happens as it happens. What he does or chooses makes no difference. He walks in well-trodden paths that lie before him. All his steps from the cradle to the grave are predetermined. Man stands helpless and powerless in life, unable to do anything about his situation. The result is that man becomes apathetic.

Within Christianity there are various streams that resemble fatalism. In practice the difference between the above philosophies and these Christian streams is not so great. It is the cosmic unity, or respectively God, that determines and arranges everything beforehand.

There are, for example, the universalists or those who teach universal reconciliation. The idea of universal reconciliation itself exists in various forms and has done so since the earliest days of church history. The simplest form of universal reconciliation amounts to the belief that ultimately, whether or not after a period of punishment, all people will acknowledge God and be saved. An extreme form of universal reconciliation is found among those who believe that the devil and his angels, after a period of torment and punishment, will also be restored. In the end, therefore, everything turns out well for everyone, no matter how long it takes.

In the doctrine of election too everything is fixed beforehand, but it only turns out well for those who are elected. There is even a double election: on the one hand those who are elected to perish, and on the other those who are elected to be saved. One can do nothing about it, for God has arranged everything in advance. He knows all things and everything happens as He has determined. Faith must be given to you. If it is not given, then things will not turn out well, whatever you do.

A popular variant of this teaching is that of having to keep the law. The law is one of the greatest dangers threatening the life of a Christian. The

law simply prescribes, forbids and obliges. The search for what the law prescribes - “What may I do and what may I not do?”- is in practice nothing other than fleeing from one’s own responsibility.
Closely linked to the law is tradition, which is highly legalistic. You bring people the gospel, but they reject it. They fall back on tradition and say they were brought up differently and are not responsible for making a choice now. They think they must walk in the paths prescribed for them by tradition or law.
But even among evangelical Christians there is the view that there is no such thing as chance and that God arranges everything for us and determines our way. We as children of God are led step by step, every day. That is of course true to a certain extent, but the Bible sets limits to it. For if we assume that God has predetermined the way for every believer down to the smallest details, that raises questions: why did the people in the Bible do what they did? Was it their own choice or were they led by God? Why would the Lord reward Abraham if it was the Lord Himself who had predetermined everything? Why does the Lord praise David for his brilliant idea of building a house for Him if He had whispered it to David Himself? (1 Chronicles 17; 2 Samuel 7) Why does the Lord reproach Israel that they never want to listen and that it is a stubborn people if He is the One who should give the people faith? It immediately becomes clear that we cannot get anywhere this way.
That is why it is essential to look at what the Bible says about leadership and fate.

Time and chance
In Psalm 90 we read about the finiteness of man on earth.

> Psalm 90:10, 12
> 10 The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.
> 12 So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

It is assumed that it is God who gave us life when we were born. And it seems with even greater certainty to be the Lord who takes life away again. People then often say: “No one dies before his time.” So everything is predetermined. When your time comes, you go. But what is someone’s time? The idea that someone dies at his appointed time comes from fatalism and not from the Bible. Of course it is true that the Lord intervenes on occasion. But that is the exception. By contrast, the normal course of events much more resembles so-called deism. That means that God created heaven and earth in the beginning and then went on to do something else.
Psalm 90 says that growing older happens with ever-increasing speed. When a person reaches a certain age, he dies. It is therefore not the case that God sits in heaven deciding whom He will take to Himself next. Although many funeral cards say “God has taken to Himself […]”, that does not happen only at the moment of someone’s death. God has

already taken us to Himself much earlier. At the moment we came to faith we were already seated with Him in heaven (Ephesians 2:6).

The constitution of man determines how long he lives

It is not God who decides when a person dies. The constitution of man determines when he dies. The time he is here on earth apparently has to do with how strong his constitution is. If someone is very strong he reaches eighty, and if he is less strong he reaches seventy (Psalm 90:10). How old someone becomes is therefore determined by his genetic properties and not by God in heaven. We do not know how old we shall become. Thanks to our health care and social provisions we may perhaps add a few more years. A person's age is determined by the strength of the man and his susceptibility to all kinds of ailments.

We now turn to the book of Ecclesiastes. Here we find in plain language a collection of the wisest and most general lessons of life. Solomon repeatedly describes the same things. He does bring forward various thoughts, but he always comes to the same conclusion: life is utterly meaningless and man is handed over to circumstances and thereby to himself. He must try to save himself.

> Ecclesiastes 9:11-12
> 11 I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.
> 12 For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.

Solomon was, after the Lord Jesus, the wisest man who ever lived on earth. In verse 11 he says that he once looked around. Yet he looked no further than the sun, so his view remained fairly limited. But we cannot look any further either. "Under the sun" means "where the sun shines its light." For everything that is dark we cannot see and we know nothing about it. By "race" a running competition is meant. We assume that whoever can run fastest will be first over the finish line. But of course that is not always so. All kinds of things can go wrong on the way: you can sprain your ankle, collapse from exhaustion or fly off the bend. "Nor the battle to the strong" means that the best does not necessarily win. "Neither yet bread to the wise" implies that someone who is wise should be able to earn his living and provide for himself. Yet in practice that is often not the case. "Nor yet riches to men of understanding" means that if you are clever you should be able to get money. But that often proves not to be the case. Life seems to be much more complicated and unjust than that.

Solomon saw under the sun in this life here on earth that "time and chance happeneth to them all." With all people—the swift, the strong, the wise, the understanding and the skilful—time and chance play a part. And that limits them in their development. Someone is in the lead, but then something unexpected happens. By "time" the circumstances in the world

are meant and not so much the clock. It is therefore about ways of thinking and philosophies of man. “Chance” can for example be someone’s weak health, which limits him in his possibilities. Or an unhappy marriage. They are sometimes very basic things that happen to many of us. Circumstances change and some things become impossible without being able to do anything about it. All people are subject to time and chance and must try to save themselves.
Verse 12 says that man does not know his time. Here too “time” should be read as “circumstances.” The fish notice nothing and swim straight into the net. So it is with man. He notices nothing and before he knows it he can no longer turn back and is caught in the cares of life. He cannot get out and there is no solution.
In connection with careers it is sometimes said afterwards of certain people that they were the right person in the right place, who had time and circumstances on their side. Of others it is said that they could have achieved much, but that they lived in the wrong time. With some people you expect things to go wrong in their life, with others you do not expect it and yet it happens. Even of the Lord Jesus people say that He was a good man with good intentions. He was driven, but lived in the wrong time. It is claimed that He had the wrong people around Him. His disciples were only simple farmers and fishermen, stupid people therefore. Furthermore it is thought that the Lord Jesus certainly did not act subtly or tactfully. After all, He repeatedly addressed the scribes with: “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers” (Matthew 3:7; 12:34; 23:33). It is assumed that if the Lord had behaved a little more politically correctly, He would probably have got much further. But that is not how God reckons.
The Bible teaches that man must make do with what he has received from home. He has inherited his genes from his parents. His parents can probably help him on his way for a while because there is similarity in constitution. But beyond that every man must try to save himself. Life is a sea with storm and raging waves. And at a certain moment it stops. We know that there will be an end to our life and that we are only here temporarily. That is said by both the psalmist and the preacher. If we still want to do something, we had better start at once. Perhaps today is the last opportunity.

Everything has its time

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

1 To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
2 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;
4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
5 A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
6 A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to

cast away;
7 A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
8 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

Solomon says here that there is a time to do this and a time to do that. The art of living is to wait for the right time. But the problem of life is that you actually do not have that time. Only if you are very strong do you reach eighty. But if you still have something to do then, it is very late. We do not benefit much from what others have in life experience. That is their experience, their perception. There is nothing more subjective than that. Only the Bible has stood firm for all those centuries. Nothing changes in God's Word. Insight into our own life in retrospect can be interesting, but we should mirror our life to what the Word of God says about it. Then our life's way sometimes looks very different. We live here, we do our best and on the way the Lord calls us and says: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). He did not say that He would then lead our life or take away our weaknesses. The Bible says that if we are not so strong we should simply walk straight ahead and make straight paths for our feet.

Hebrews 12:12-13
12 Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees;
13 And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

We should limit ourselves and walk the straight way. We ourselves are responsible for that. If we only keep waiting, it will not succeed. The idea that the Lord fills in our lives, determines every step for us, tells us exactly when we should go left or right, is always coupled with the verb "to wait." People seem to be waiting for the Lord's leading. But that does not work like that. If "leading" means "steering" and you are standing still, then God can keep pulling on your steering wheel, but nothing happens. You must first set yourself in motion before God can steer anything at all.

Dying before your time

We go back again to Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 7:15-17
15 All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness.
16 Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?
17 Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?

Some people can live well without God. They get very far in this life and even prolong their days. By contrast, decent, kind and righteous people perish in their righteousness. Some of them do not live so long. It is therefore not the case that if one serves God in this life on earth one will

have a long, happy and prosperous life. It is true, however, that if one serves the Lord here, one will be rewarded by the Lord in the future.
We shall look a little more closely at verses 16 and 17: “Be not righteous over much” and “Be not over much wicked.” The one is the opposite of the other. It concerns two extremes. Although it is said here that a righteous life is wise and a wicked life is foolish, both extremes bring destruction upon a person or cause a person to die before his time. The expression “die before his time” is remarkable, for there are many people who claim that one dies at one’s appointed time. Something like: “It is his time, therefore nothing can be done about it and so he dies.” The Bible nowhere teaches that. God is not the One who decides how long a person lives. If that were the case, one could not die before or outside one’s time. It is simply said here that if one lives too wickedly or too righteously, this makes such an assault on a person’s strength and reserves that his life is thereby shortened. If a man exhausts and burdens himself too heavily, he will not last so long. Of course there are exceptions, but that has to do with a person’s constitution that determines what he can bear and how strong he is by nature.
One should therefore not be too righteous. That leads to nothing. One must sometimes do things one would rather not do and that go against one’s own ideals. They may even go against God’s law, but it may sometimes be wise to do them anyway. One should make compromises and cut one’s losses. One should accept that one is misused and insulted by others. There is no point in being too righteous, for one thereby brings ruin upon oneself. The reverse is also true. If one knows no principles and in general does not keep to guidelines, rights, norms and values, one brings ruin upon oneself just as much. Then one has no life either. There is therefore nothing wrong with occasionally making a deal and making concessions. That is simply how it goes in the world.
A fine example is that of the carriageway. There are two lines on the road. You should drive roughly between them, for exactly between them is not possible. Moreover it is very sensible to use the full width of the carriageway, especially in the bend. Then you can get through more smoothly. In exactly the same way one gets through life better. One should learn to keep one’s balance. In practice one is given some room in life and within that room one should live. At the moment one makes compromises, one takes responsibility upon oneself. If they are important things with regard to one’s life’s way, one carries that with one for the rest of one’s life.

Occupy till I come
Then there is still the parable in Luke 19.

> Luke 19:12-26
> 12 He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.
> 13 And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.
> 14 But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.

15 And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.
16 Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds.
17 And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.
18 And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds.
19 And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities.
20 And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin:
21 For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.
22 And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow:
23 Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?
24 And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds.
25 (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.)
26 For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.

The nobleman in the parable is the Lord Himself. Before He departed He handed over His goods to His servants. These goods were a certain responsibility expressed in the parable as money. Then He said: “Occupy till I come.” He did not say: “Wait for My guidance, do nothing until you experience My guidance.” After a long time He returned, called His servants and asked how everything had gone. The servant in verse 20 had pious stories, but in practice he had done nothing. That was not good, for he should have traded. He himself was responsible for that. It is fine if the Lord gives you a ministry, but afterwards you must make something of it. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that the Lord then has a hand in it or leads it in that way.

Of course we know enough examples from the Bible where the Lord intervenes on occasion and points out another route, sometimes even literally. This happened with Paul for example.

Acts 16:6-10
6 Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia,
7 After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.
8 And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas.
9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and

help us.
10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

The Lord let Paul know that he must go to Macedonia. He had to cross the sea and go from Troas via an island to Europe.
Balaam was also corrected when he threatened to go the wrong way. The Lord stopped Balaam, which incidentally cost Him some effort (Numbers 22–24; Nehemiah 13:2).The Lord also intervened with Noah. The Lord said to Noah that it would rain in 120 years' time and that he would do well to build a boat (Genesis 6).3. Words for "leadership" in the Bible and their forms
To find out what leadership means for us in practice, it is obvious that we should look up all the Scripture passages where the word "leadership" and its forms occur.
We limit ourselves to the New Testament, because we are concerned with the question whether in our days we are dependent on the Lord's leadership and what that leadership would consist of.
We know two Greek words for "to lead." These are the verbs hodegéo and ago.
Hodegéo is used mainly in the sense of "to show the way." More about that later. Ago has, besides the meaning "to lead," by implication also the meaning "to bring" or "to fetch." Then there are various compounds with the word ago. In this way we get the words diágo, exágo and archègos. We also find the word ago back in Dutch in the term "agogics."

Agogics
Agogics is practised by agogues.
"Agogue" literally means "leader." In the Dutch language we have compound words such as "pedagogy." Pedagogues are leaders of children. On Wikipedia the following definition stands under "social agogics":
"Social agogics is the practice theory of professionally intervening in psychosocial change processes. The change can be exagogic (help), anagogic (formation) or catagogic (prevention). The result can be incidental and product-oriented (filling in a document for child benefit) or structural and process-oriented (the client is strengthened in his problem-solving skill). To make the change possible the social agogue uses interactive communication, relationship building and conversation techniques (which either build trust or encourage action). Change comes through the agogic process that consists of a series of steps: motivation, diagnosis, objectives, strategy determination, execution and evaluations."
With "change processes" the cares of life, or rather the problems and the struggle for existence, are meant. There we people nowadays seem to need help, which is supplied by agogues. The idea that life is change and that that change must be accompanied finds its origin in the view that man and thereby society is malleable. If you want to form or make man, much must change. Man must be influenced and formed according to an ideal image.

If you remain yourself, you are not malleable. But man may not be himself in our society. Nowadays he must be formed and changed. But the problem is that a man cannot change. At most behaviour can be taught to him. That happens for example with people with a psychological disorder. The concepts “psychological disorder” or “neurosis” have been abolished and softening expressions such as “a confused person” are used. Instead of saying that someone has a psychological disorder, one says that his behaviour is disturbed. Those people must be accompanied in order to learn certain behaviour. Because one cannot change the inside of a man, one only pays attention any more to the outside being uniform. Agogues therefore occupy themselves with symptom control because they only regulate the outward behaviour of man. If you try to live as others expect of you, you become frustrated. Then you have to act: you must pretend to be different from what you are. But when that happens, you live in conflict with yourself. Moreover everyone often has different expectations of you. Eventually you no longer know who you are and you need an agogue.
The Bible teaches that man is not malleable. That man is placed under a law can be useful for himself and for others, but he does not change by it. The only way to bring about change is not modification but new birth. We come to faith and receive new life. That life would come to development. That happens in practice at the expense of the old man. Out of the heart nothing good comes forth. That is why the Word of God should be planted in our hearts (James 1:21). One can also say it differently: the Lord Jesus Himself would dwell in our hearts. Then something different comes out of the heart. That is the new man that comes into being by the new birth. God actually does not expect much from man. He expects only that we unconditionally submit ourselves to His Word. We would learn that by making this Word our own and living from it. When we let ourselves be taught in the truth, that changes us from within. Only that makes us strangers to the world that after all holds the truth under (Romans 1:18). It therefore does not help us in our social life, but it does form us into a personality and identity in Christ. That is why Paul said:

> Philippians 1:21
> 21 For to me to live is Christ […]

If we submit ourselves to an agogue, we literally hand over the leadership of our life. If we nevertheless hand over the leadership, we can best give it to the Lord. He then makes us known who He is. He gives us His identity. Christ is the Word. He is the One who submitted Himself to the Word of God. He ran His course that God set before Him. He fully trusted that Word of God and thereby the promises of God. That should also be our identity. According to the biblical ideal we are by nature lost sinners who have become the property of Christ. We stand on the promises of our Lord and God. We know what God does, has done and will do. We know that no one can pluck us out of His hand. We know that He has begun a good work in us and will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ (see Philippians 1:6). We live from that. The Lord therefore does not literally lead our whole life. But He does give us an example, a shepherd or a leader. As our leader He goes before us. We should follow Him.

“Ago” in the literal sense
The verb ago (ἄγω) therefore means “to lead” in the sense of “to bring.” It occurs 71 times in the Bible. In by far the majority of cases it concerns someone who is taken by the hand and brought somewhere. That is less interesting for us in this connection and therefore we shall not go into it further here. Later in this chapter we shall discuss the cases where the word ago is used in a more figurative sense
.We now go on to the forms of the verb ago. Sometimes a preposition is added. Thus the words diágo and exágo arise.

Diágo
Dia (διά) means “through.” Diágo (διάγω) is translated with “to lead through” or “to spend.” In the dictionary the definition stands with the word diágo: “to live or to spend time.” In that meaning it occurs in the first epistle to Timothy.

> 1 Timothy 2:1-2
> 1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;
> 2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

The word “lead” in verse 2 is the translation of diágo. It could also have been translated with “spend.” The intention is that we have the leadership over our own lives. We do not pray for the authorities so that they would lead us, but we pray so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.
We also find the word diágo back in Titus 3. In Dutch it is not immediately clear, but in the Greek it does stand there.

> Titus 3:1-3
> 1 Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work,
> 2 To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.
> 3 For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.Here diágo is translated with “living.” Some believers on Crete spent their life in malice and envy. They therefore led their life in malice and envy.

Exágo
Then there is still another preposition that can be placed before ago. That is ek (ἐκ) which means “out.” In combination with ago that then becomes exágo (ἐξάγω). That is translated with “to lead out.”
As an example one can mention John 10:3.

> John 10:2-3
> 2 But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.
> 3 To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.

John 10 is about the good shepherd and the sheep. The porter opens the door for the shepherd who leads the sheep out. The shepherd walks before the sheep and calls them by their name. “To lead” always has the meaning of “to go before.” “To lead” is therefore not to go behind with a whip in the hand or to walk beside someone and intervene or correct now and then. Further the word exágo occurs in Hebrews 8.

> Hebrews 8:8-9
> 8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:
> 9 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

The meaning of exágo speaks for itself: it concerns here the exodus from Egypt. The people of Israel is led out. Also at the exodus from Egypt the Lord went before, for example in the form of the pillar of cloud. In the same way exágo is used in Acts 7:36, 40 and in Acts 13:17.
Then there are still a number of texts where with the word exágo it is indicated that people are brought from A to B. This is the case in Mark 8:23; 15:20; Luke 24:50; Acts 5:19; 12:17, 16:37+39; 21:38.“Ago” in the figurative sense
The verb ago (ἄγω) therefore means “to lead” in the sense of “to bring.” Sometimes this word is used in a more figurative sense. These Scripture passages we shall examine more closely.

> Romans 2:4
> 4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

In the epistle to the Romans the basis of the gospel is set out. God will bring judgment upon the world. In anticipation of that we have the possibility to repent. God’s goodness leads us to that repentance. That is in accordance with the thought that God wills that all men should be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). The question in Romans 2:4 is whether one even wants to let oneself be led to that repentance. God wants to lead man to repentance, but most people do not come to repentance. In that sense God’s leadership is therefore relative: His leadership only applies to the people who let themselves be led and is therefore not compelling. In this portion it is primarily about unbelievers, but the same principle applies to us believers. One can follow the Leader, but it is not compulsory. One can listen to the voice of the Shepherd, but one is not forced to it.
Further the concept “ago” occurs in Romans 8:14. This verse is essential for our daily life as children of God. We have received the Spirit of God. That Spirit we usually call “the Holy Spirit.” In this chapter He is also called “the Spirit of God,” or “the Spirit of Christ.”

> Romans 8:9-17
> 9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

> 10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.
> 11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.
> 12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.
> 13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.
> 14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.
> 15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.
> 17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

We are led by the Spirit of God. Chapters 6–8 of the epistle to the Romans are about the question what the standard is for our life as children of God. We would live, not under the dominion of sin (Romans 6), not under the dominion of the law (Romans 7), but under the leadership of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8). Sin and the law are compulsive, but leadership is not. We are sinners who sin because we stand under the power of sin. The same applies to the law. We can do nothing about that. But we live under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. We can do something about that. We can submit ourselves to the leadership of the Spirit, but also withdraw from it. For example by still living under the dominion of sin and the law. In verse 14 it stands “as many as are led by the Spirit of God.” That therefore means that not everyone, not even every believer, is led by that Spirit. But those who do let themselves be led by the Spirit are or become sons of God.

The translation “children” in the KJV is not correct. There should stand “sons” (hyos, υἱός), for there is an essential difference between children and sons. A child is small and underage. It cannot bear responsibility. A son on the other hand is an adult heir who can.

In this verse we therefore find the answer to the question where we are led to. In Romans 2:4 the goal was repentance. One only comes to that if one takes example from the Leader and follows Him.

Believers only become sons if they let themselves be led by the Spirit of God.

The expression “adoption of children” is equally incorrect. Here too the word “sons” (hyos, υἱός) stands in the Greek. Further there does not stand the word “adoption,” but “appointment” (tithēmi, τίθημι). It therefore concerns sonship (huiothesia, υἱοθεσία).

In this verse we therefore find the answer to the question where we are led to. In Romans 2:4 the goal was repentance. One only comes to that if one takes example from the Leader and follows Him.

> Believers only become sons if they let themselves be led by the Spirit of God.1 Thessalonians 4:14

> 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

In this verse ago is translated with “bring.” The word “again” before bring does not stand in the original text. God will therefore “bring those who have fallen asleep in Jesus with Him.” It concerns here the resurrection of the believers.
Then ago also stands in 2 Timothy 3.

> 2 Timothy 3:6
> 6 For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts,

In this verse “led away” is the translation of ago. Here too one could have used the word “led”: “… and by divers lusts led.”
For the last time we come across the word ago in Hebrews 2.

> Hebrews 2:9-10
> 9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.
> 10 For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

It was necessary that the Lord Jesus would die for all: He would by the grace of God taste death for every man (verse 9). Further the Lord Jesus leads many sons to glory. Here therefore in principle the same stands as in Romans 8: He leads us to sonship, to glory. In the same verse stands the word archègos in which ago is enclosed.

Archègos

Archègos (ἀρχηγός) is a noun and is translated with “captain” or “author.” Here two words are joined together: archè (ἀρχή) which in Dutch is rendered with “arch- […]”. Thus we know the words “archangel” or “patriarch.” Archè means “first.” Ègos is the corruption of ago. Archègos is therefore literally translated with “first leader.”

> Hebrews 2:10
> 10 For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Our captain should be made perfect through sufferings. Actually the word archègos is a pleonasm for the first by definition goes before and is thereby the leader. Perhaps there are still more leaders, but the chief leader always goes before. Thus we know in the Church shepherds, but also the chief Shepherd. That is Christ.
Jesus of Nazareth was after all the first who was appointed Son in His resurrection. Thereby He is the standard for all others, for God would lead many sons to glory. In that sense He leads us, for He went before us and shows the way. That is the same as the Shepherd in John 10 who goes before His sheep. He leads them to green pastures. Not with a stick behind the sheep, but with His voice before His sheep. We must learn to listen to His voice and follow Him.
The term archègos we find a few more times in the Bible.

Acts 3:15

15 And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.

Here archègos is translated with “Prince.” Archè means “first” and therefore “foremost.” And our word “prince” means “foremost.” The Prince of life is still the chief leader who goes before and who is our example. The same we also find in Acts 5.

Acts 5:31

31 Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

Here too archègos is translated with “Prince.” It concerns the Lord Jesus who was exalted by God. He is our chief leader.

Hebrews 12:1-2

1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

In Hebrews 2:10 the chief leader goes before to lead the sons to glory. In Hebrews 10 the Lord is therefore also called “the living way,” which means that He Himself is the way and shows the way. In Hebrews 12:1 it stands that we have a great cloud of witnesses around us. Those are spiritual witnesses who have already died but still speak (Hebrews 11). Further it stands that we should run the race set before us with patience. “Patience” does not mean doing nothing or patiently and passively waiting, but doing something passionately, with passion and enthusiasm therefore. “Patience” means that one lets oneself be led. The one who leads goes before and gives the direction; and the one who follows suffers. When one lets oneself be led, one submits oneself to another power that one lets come over oneself. One puts oneself fully in and surrenders oneself to the power that drives one.

We are children of God and a race is set before us. A race would not be necessary if someone took us by the hand and led us step by step to a certain place. Then we would not need to know what “the good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:2) is for our life, but would see that automatically. But it does not work that way. God sets a race before us, gives us so to speak a pound and says: “Occupy till I come” (Luke 19:13). We would do well to run that race in trust in the Lord. Then we run a way and that way goes via the implanting of the Word in our hearts (James 1:21). Perhaps we come in our life to a crossroads and do not know whether we must go right or left. We can think about it for a moment, but not too long, for then nothing happens. We must make a choice as quickly as possible, walk on and in that way lead our own life. Thus we run with patience the race that is set before us. We have all received gifts from the Lord and the Lord wants to use us for something. He gives us a job. How that looks exactly is different for each of us. But we all have that race and that is called for each of us “the race of faith.”

Characteristic for all those races is that we are faithful to our Lord and live from faith.
While we run that race we should look unto the Lord Jesus. We find this principle illustrated in Peter. Together with the other disciples he sat in a little boat on the sea. Then the Lord came walking on the water. Then Peter steps out of the boat towards the Lord and also walked on the waves. As long as he looked unto the Lord Jesus he did not sink into the water. (Matthew 14:24-32) So it is also with our lives. We should be directed towards the Lord, but walk ourselves. Whether we can understand it or not. As long as we look unto Him we do not sink away in the water and we shall come to the Lord and have a share in the glory in the future.
He is the first who has completely run that race and at the end of it received the crown. That was after He by the grace of God tasted death for every man. He bore His cross and despised the shame that came with that race. The result of that was that God gave Him a name above every name (Philippians 2:9). Moreover God highly exalted Him and He now sits at the right hand of God in heaven (Hebrews 12:2). So it is also with us. That the Lord Himself says in Revelation 3. We receive what He Himself received from His Father.

> Revelation 3:21
> 21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

We are just like the Lord Jesus called to sonship. He is already appointed Son and we shall in the future be appointed sons. This is indicated in the Bible with the word “predestination.” Being directed towards our Lord and Saviour is what binds us as believers. That is called “the following of Christ.” That means that we live from faith, trust in God’s promise and reach out to the glory that is set before us. We remain faithful to the Lord and His Word. Thus we learn to go our way in dependence on the Lord.

Hodegéo
Besides ago there is still another word for “to lead.” That is hodegéo (ὁδηγέω). It means “to show the way.” We find this word in John 16.

> John 16:12-13
> 12 I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.
> 13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

The Holy Spirit leads us. For believers from previous dispensations this was different. Thus Abraham was led by God to a land unknown to him. The Lord said to Abraham: “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee” (Genesis 12:1). He set out without knowing where he would end up. But that does not apply to believers in our dispensation. We do not live in the days of Abraham. We do know where we are going. The Lord tells us where we are heading. He does not simply take us to heaven, for we are

already seated there with Christ. He brings us to our sonship and glory by leading us into all the truth.
The Lord is building His Church today (see Acts 15:14). She is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). The Church is therefore a house of God, a temple in which the truth dwells. In that way He is building and gathering for Himself a people of priests. A priest is someone who is responsible for practising and preserving the Word of God. That is why God leads us into all the truth, and thereby we are educated and instructed in the imperishable truth of the Word of God.

> John 8:31-32
> 31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;
> 32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

The Lord wants us to let ourselves be led to the glory He has promised us. The route goes via the truth that we should understand (verse 32). For we live in a world “who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). The Lord delivers us from that world and invites us to come to Him. He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). He is the true, living way. We can supplement this with the text from Isaiah 55.Isaiah 55:3
3 Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live;
[…]The Lord wants to lead us into all the truth. Our motto should be: “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17). Then the truth will make us free (John 8:32). When the Jews heard this they became angry. They claimed they had always been free and therefore did not need to be made free. But the Lord said this was a misunderstanding. The natural man is a slave of sin, the law and religion. We cannot become better people. The Bible says that man is incorrigible. The only thing left is that we fill ourselves with the Word of truth. That will guard our hearts and minds. It concerns here another nature, namely the life of Christ in us, which should grow and come to development. It makes us strangers to the world and unfit to be anything or anyone in the world.

> Galatians 1:4
> 4 Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father;

God draws us out of this present evil age. That happens via the way of the New Covenant. Not under the law and in captivity, but under grace and in freedom. And freedom exists only when one has responsibility. Without responsibility there is no freedom, only licence. One must be driven and have a goal in life. We have received our freedom so that we may set our sights on the goal set before us. We should leave the past behind and not look back any more.

> Philippians 3:14
> 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

The Lord therefore leads us to glory and sonship. Because we have that goal we can live in freedom. We can run our race, looking unto Jesus. During that race we may sometimes veer a little to the left or right. Zigzagging we go that way. Whether we now walk a bit on the left side of the road or on the right side does not matter so much. Some need to look

at both the left and the right side, others have a narrower view and simply walk straight ahead. That does not matter and the Lord allows this, as long as we keep the goal in sight. Whether we deviate too far to the left or right, He will deal with. If that happens, the Lord can give us a push, but He does not have to. God can intervene, but it is not said that He does. Through the Spirit we learn to understand the Word of truth. The truth is that man is saved and blessed by the grace of God. Whatever goes wrong in our life and whatever we have done wrong does not matter. It is about whether the power of God is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9) and whether we remain faithful to the Lord under all circumstances. We should live in the consciousness that we are the property of Christ. It is the intention that He should be glorified in our lives. It is not serious if the world speaks shame of us and slanders us. That was also so with the Lord Jesus. He not only bore His cross but endured the shame. That is also our task. At the moment it costs us something, we should remember that it cost the Lord much more. If we think we are suffering, we must realise that the Lord suffered much more. Ultimately it is so that when things go badly with us, we get to know the Lord better.

Further the word hodegéo occurs in four other Scripture passages.

> Matthew 15:14
> 14 Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.
> Luke 6:39
> 39 And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?

Blind people cannot see the way themselves. Therefore someone who can see must show them the way.

> Acts 8:31
> 31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

Also through instruction or teaching one can show someone the way.

> Revelation 7:17
> 17 For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

The Lamb is Christ. He is the Leader who will show the way. He brings us to green pastures and to the truth that leads to the inheritance.4. Scripture passages about “leadership” without the word being mentioned

There are a number of Scripture passages in the Bible where we do not come across the words ago or hodegéo, but where the same thought is expressed.

Deo volente: if the Lord wills and we live

We now go first to James 4:13-16. If we were to read that passage in Latin, the expression “Deo volente” could very well have stood there, which means “if the Lord wills.”

> James 4:13-16
> 13 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:
> 14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is

your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.
15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.
16 But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.

We all make plans as if life is endless, as if life is malleable. But that is not so. We should not make too many plans and simply say that in the future we are going to do this or that. That is pride, for we do not have the power to look so far ahead. We do not even know whether we shall still have the opportunity to do so. Life in this old creation is uncertain; all kinds of things can happen that we do not control and then we shall have to adjust our plans. Our plans should therefore be with reservation and in humility.
In James 4:15 we read: “For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.” This verse suggests that the Lord indeed has a hand in everything, shows us the way step by step and that everything in our life must be in accordance with the will of the Lord. The question, however, is whether that is really meant here. It remains to be seen whether the Lord has determined beforehand what we shall or shall not do. If we say: “If the Lord wills, I am going fishing tomorrow,” that will certainly not mean that the Lord has an interest in us going fishing tomorrow. But if we enjoy it, we should certainly do it. We should enjoy it as long as we can. That is not against the will of the Lord, for the chance is great that the Lord is not occupied with that at all.
What does James 4:15 mean? An alternative translation of this verse is: “If the Lord wills, so we shall live, and do this or that.” We also read it that way in the NBG translation. The same interpretation we also find in the Leidse translation: “If the Lord wills, we shall remain in life and do this or that.”
What does the Lord will or not will? That we live or not. If the Lord wants to keep us alive, He does so. He sometimes intervenes in our life. He perhaps stops us from crossing the street without looking. That can very well be. We should only not think that the Lord is occupied with that every day. That is not the rule. We should after all watch ourselves, as far as that lies within our power.
Of course there are examples in the Bible that show that God causes people to die. If the Lord does not want to keep us alive, He does not do so. If we really get in the Lord’s way, He can take us away (see 1 Corinthians 11:27-30). That is very exceptional, absolutely not the rule and it only happens incidentally.
Man is inclined to set death aside. Death is still a great taboo and we are so proud as to deny death. That is why the Preacher says that it is better for a man to be in the house of mourning than in the house of feasting.

Ecclesiastes 7:2
2 It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.

A wedding hall or feast hall (= house of feasting) awakens expectation for the earthly future. It gives the impression that man has eternal life on earth before him. So it is better to be in a house of mourning and to be

confronted with death. Then one is reminded that one's life is finite and that one must be careful with it. One day it will end. If one wants to do something, one had better start today. We can never say beforehand what we are going to do next year. That is pride, for we do not know whether we shall really do those things. We can at most say that we plan or are preparing to do this or that.
The less we have of life, the more valuable it becomes. People only begin to live when they are told that it will be over within the foreseeable future. That is why it is the intention that in the time we still have in the flesh we should not do the will of men, but the will of God (see 1 Peter 4:2).The Lord takes care of us
When we put our trust in the Lord, He will take care of us. That stands for example in Matthew 6.

> Matthew 6:25-27
> 25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?
> 26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?
> 27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

The Lord does not tell us from day to day what we must do or not do and He does not lead us from day to day in everything we do. But nevertheless the Lord takes care of us. That is illustrated in verse 26 by the birds of the air. They have no pension scheme, no capital or investment insurance and yet they do not need to worry. In verse 27 it is of course about the length of life and not about the bodily height of man.

> Matthew 6:28-34
> 28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:
> 29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.
> 30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?
> 31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?
> 32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.
> 33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.
> 34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Eating, drinking and clothing are metaphors for the daily necessities of life. We do not need to worry about them. The world does that. They go through life without God. But we have a heavenly Father. He knows what

we need (verse 32). That shortens our prayer considerably; we no longer need to ask for everything. That is also confirmed earlier in this chapter.

> Matthew 6:6-8
> 6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.
> 7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.
> 8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

One should pray in secret, for it is no one else's business what one prays. The Gentiles think that they will be heard by praying long. That is illustrated among other things in 1 Kings 18 where the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel cried to their god during a prayer of a whole day. It helped nothing. Then Elijah came to speak. He had not even finished and God did what had to happen. The heavenly Father therefore knows what we need. But whether He then gives us everything we want is not yet certain. We should after all first seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness (verse 33). That kingdom and that righteousness should have priority in our life. We should in the first place serve not men or ourselves, but God. The kingdom is hidden, but nevertheless we can set our sights on it. That also stands in Colossians.

> Colossians 3:1-2
> 1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.
> 2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

The righteousness of God has directly to do with the gospel. The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth […]. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed (Romans 1:16-17). That righteousness we should seek and set our sights on God's right.
When we seek His kingdom and His righteousness, all that we need will be added to us. It therefore concerns first and not second or third necessities of life. Time and chance determine everything in this world. But the Lord gives chance a helping hand and causes very much to be added to us. The Lord knows what we need. He gives us what we have need of and sometimes even more than that, for God is generous. He acts above all that we can ask or think.

> Ephesians 3:20
> 20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.

The Lord adds all these things to those who seek Him. He gives more than we ask or think. That is why we do not need to be anxious and every day has enough of its own trouble (Matthew 6:34). The Lord Jesus says here that we cannot look further than a few hours ahead in our life. That is why it is good that the Lord takes care of His staff. We should live from the hand of God. One day at a time with our eyes fixed on Him under all circumstances. He is our chief Leader and Finisher of faith.
AMEN